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# How to Make the Most of FACE-TO-FACE SELLING

Online discounts may cause the loss of potential sales, but the people who walk into your showroom have a purpose. Give them a reason to buy from you. BY MARK OKUN

At this time in our lives, we are accustomed to the ease and speed the digital world has made available to us. Categorically, it has leveled the playing field when it comes to making any purchase. Face it, we all buy online in one way or another.

Although e-tailers aggressively court shoppers with pop-up discounts and promises of speedy delivery, they also accept that digital can never replace the tactile experience consumers desire when it comes to a personal purchase.

We must be grateful when clients walk into our showrooms today; it is a deliberate and specific action. Often they want to verify the information they uncovered during their internet search before they buy. This initial visit is rapidly becoming the only visit customers want to make, and why not? Time is precious and it is easy to buy anywhere, at any time. We must give them a reason to buy from us.

When speaking with showrooms across the country,

I've heard the common theme that foot traffic is down. This decline alone remarkably increases the value of every person who has taken the time to walk into your store — yet in many cases, we interact with them like it is still 1999!

I believe that the most significant opportunity showrooms have today over their digital competition is to optimize the limited, personal, one-on-one time with the customer. Developing this personal connection is essential, and it may be the only chance the showroom has.

## IN-PERSON SELLING BEGINS ONLINE

Customers walking into a showroom are not looking for more products; they have been inundated with targeted product choices. They are coming in to confirm what they have seen online with a tactile experience, to verify the information they've heard or read and discover what they don't know from the expert. *The showroom is the place where the experts live.*

Now, what does digital marketing have to do with face-to-face sales? This hurry up, overbooked world we live in demands that we redefine both our traditional and digital marketing strategies. The goal is to build rapport and create trust with clients while demonstrating that the showroom has experts available when they want them.

Creating trust is difficult when using a traditional marketing approach that only pushes product, the sale, and a discount — nothing makes you stand out from the crowd. There is no trust built or experience promised. *It all boils down to trust.*

A simple formula for building your digital reputation is to blend emotion with logic in story form. This concept could fill an entire article, some of which has been touched upon earlier in this column (“Expanding Your Market Reach”) in the October 2017 issue.

Face-to-face selling must bring increased value to the client. It needs to be intentional and direct, and with a process of choreographed interactions that reinforce the trust that is being built digitally. This type of selling is a meld of marketing and sales skills, with only three acceptable outcomes:

- To sell the item the client wants at that time
- To schedule an appointment to sell it later, again face to face
- To get the client away from the internet and into your showroom

The activities required to reach any of these goals are the same. It will take practiced presentations that are persuasive, creating questions for the informed client, and learning to ask for the order. Not only does face-to-face selling reinforce the trust built digitally, it creates an opportunity to demonstrate products and go-together items. Implemented properly, these techniques will increase the likelihood of converting the browsing customer into a buyer. When a trusting relationship is created, customers will allow you to become an advisor in their buying experience.

## COME TO THEIR AIDA

AIDA is an acronym for: Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action. The term was reportedly created in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century by American advertising and sales pioneer E. St. Elmo Lewis, but the basics are still applicable in 2019 with a couple of modifications.

## ATTENTION

The way we develop attention through our online marketing efforts is the feeling the customer will anticipate when they visit the showroom. When the

goal of the initial digital contact is based on building trust, reinforcing trustworthiness is critical in the first few moments of the client exchange.

Trust does not happen with the old standby conversation-starters, “Can I help you?” or “What brings you in?” These are worn-out words that have little effect, or at worst put the first brick in the wall. It takes thought and practice to start a conversation with a client in the trial-and-test mode; I've nicknamed this type of customer “The Seeker.” A little gratitude goes a long way with many people. For example, try this phrase: “Thanks for coming in! Are you here to work with one of our project experts or are you checking out something you may have seen already?”

*It is crucial that we find out what customers are searching for and how we can satisfy them.* By beginning with a client-focused question, we can start to locate where they are in their buying journey.

## INTEREST

Generating client interest was once dominated by product selection and sale pricing. While these remain motivators, they no longer drive sales like they once did. In face-to-face selling, we must promote not just buying a product, but buying that product *from us.*

The interest we want to raise is that we are experts and the showroom is the best choice for buying those products. It all stems from your “USP” — Unique Selling Proposition. Utilizing a well-formatted USP will reinforce digital marketing efforts and explain who you are as an expert in your area.

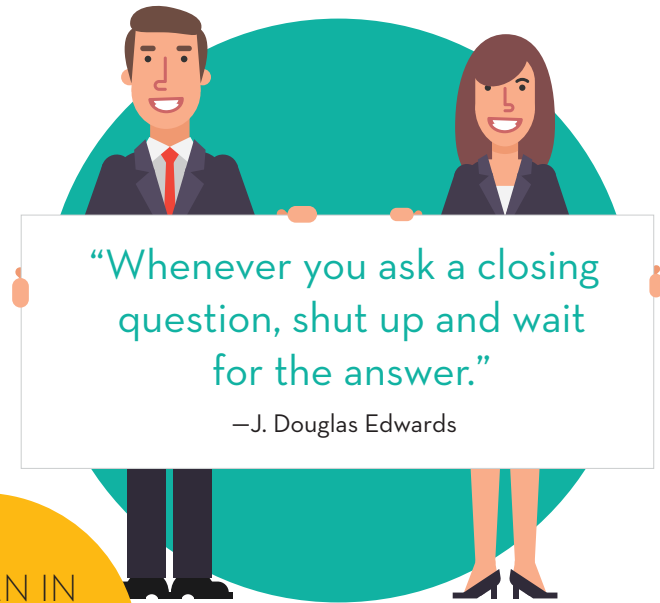
This method begins with a simple question. “Did you know our showroom has been a reliable resource for our local community for 30 years?” The answer will be yes or no; in either case, have a prepared response. Another question that builds expert status is, “Have you ever worked with a professional lighting specialist?” Again, the response is yes or no, and your response to either one is “Great!” Then tell them what to expect when working with a professional like yourself.

## DESIRE

This is the two-fold emotional response we want to generate with every client. The most critical desire we want to communicate is that they will feel most comfortable doing business with us. Because desire is emotional, using logic alone will not get the result you want. The way to create — and capitalize on — desire is with authentic storytelling that combines logic



“By beginning with a client-focused question, we can start to locate where they are in their buying journey.”



“Whenever you ask a closing question, shut up and wait for the answer.”

—J. Douglas Edwards

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and emotion. I touched on this in last month's column "Creating Sales Stars."

Stories let you share a tremendous amount of information while increasing desire. Unlike questioning, building good stories takes effort, creativity, and has an emotional memory. Your story must have a moral — which is an action the client wants to mirror or repel away from. The story you create has facts interwoven into it that support the emotional and logical response you want the client to have.

There are many styles of stories that can be used in face-to-face sales, such as recounting a time you solved a customer's problem. Stories subtly focus on eliminating common objections before they are expressed.

**ACTION**

The action here is asking for the sale. Whenever I am on the road, I shop in all the categories I serve; it is my passion. My retail stops range from appliance, furniture, and mattress stores to plumbing and lighting showrooms. I've found one common denominator: I am never asked to buy anything.

I've had lots of information and pleasant interactions, but I've never been asked if I wanted my item of interest. Is it no wonder salespeople have measured closing rates of 35 percent average? I see that as a 65-percent failure rate!

While it is impossible to close 100 percent of the time, these numbers are far too low when we satisfy a client with information yet let them leave us to buy online. You may think that this low production rate does not apply to you. The truth is, if you do not measure sales productivity daily, by the individual and based on closing either a sale, an appointment to

make a purchase, or solidly making them part of your digital ecosystem, then the client is often lost forever.

Many believe "closing" happens at the end of the presentation, but I want you to entertain the idea that closing — I prefer the term "confirming" — occurs from the time you ask your first question. To be crystal clear, confirming throughout the presentation is *NOT* acting aggressive or pushy; it is being assertive using the correct questions at the proper time.

At any point in your presentation when you share an important piece of information, perform a trial close to confirm with the client, "How does that sound to you?" Or you can vary the question to be something like, "Do you see what I mean?" "Does that make sense to you?" and "Are we on the same track?" An affirmative reply means they agree with you. Make a mental note of the answer so it can be used in a summary closing action.

J. Douglas Edwards is commonly known as the god-father of sales training. I was introduced to his form of professional sales development in 1980 when a sales manager gave me a set of cassettes to listen to while driving. Although some aspects of his sales education have become null today, the one lasting piece of advice I garnered was, "When you ask a question — any question — shut up and wait for an answer."

No matter what answer you get from a client, you can work with it. The pressure of silence is often too intense for most people; wait for the response. Silently waiting is a practiced skill. It involves asking a direct question and then remaining quiet until the client speaks. If you talk first, then you are guessing at what the client is thinking. Please wait...because your guess is probably wrong.

Asking for the order is a mandatory action for every salesperson. If you have done your job correctly, making a purchase is the logical next step for the client. Closing the order can be as easy as reiterating the client's statement and asking for agreement. For example, "You mentioned you have a contractor coming in a couple of days. We have that item available now for you, shall we check this off of your list?" Another close could be, "You mentioned this piece is the correct color and size, did you have any other questions for me or should we continue?"

Selling is not a spectator sport! To be successful, you must get in the trenches without fear and interact with the client face-to-face without interruption because they are the essential part of our business.

Wishing you all a prosperous 2019, and as always *Happy Selling!* ❖

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